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# The Haunted Island: Medieval History and the Old English Elegies in Brenda Chamberlain's *Tide-race* (1962)

Francesca Brooks 

This article explores the relationship between *Tide-race*, a 1962 memoir by the Welsh poet and artist Brenda Chamberlain, and medieval culture and literature on Ynys Enlli. Written in the decades after the Second World War when Chamberlain had left mainland Wales, *Tide-race* is a memoir of the artist's time on Enlli living with its small community of fishermen and farmers. In contrast to other works of twentieth-century island literature, I argue, Chamberlain rejected dominant, medieval patriarchal histories of Enlli, refusing to read the island as a male monastic site, or as a Welsh nationalist or cultural space. *Tide-race* is a medieval modern text that is deeply ambivalent about what medieval culture means for modern conceptions of identity, specifically Welshness and womanhood. Chamberlain's late modernist work has been neglected because of her status as a Welsh woman writer working outside of the centres of modernism, and she has never been considered in the context of Medievalism Studies. By bringing archival material from the Brenda Chamberlain papers at the National Library of Wales together with the published memoir, this article brings to light an unremarked upon interest in Old English literature and traces the development of Chamberlain's medievalism in the post-war period. Although her use of the Old English elegies—*The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Wife's Lament*—has remained unnoticed by Chamberlain's critics, these early medieval poems are translated and adapted in her prose in ways that allow her to exorcize old grudges and challenge masculine ideals.

## INTRODUCTION

In a 1971 essay the Welsh artist-writer Brenda Chamberlain (1912–1971) wrote that two events had changed her life after the Second World War. The first was the restoration of contact with her German friend Karl Von Laer. The second was 'being taken for a two-day visit to Ynys Enlli', the island also known as Bardsey off the coast of north Wales, which would become her home for the next 15 years from 1947 to 1962.<sup>1</sup> Chamberlain initially trained as an artist at the Royal Academy Schools, London, in the early 1930s. In the 1930s and 1940s she was involved with a number of small press, Welsh cultural nationalist initiatives, including through her collaboration

Permission to publish materials from the Brenda Chamberlain Papers at Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/the National Library of Wales and from *Tide-race* has been granted by the estate of Brenda Chamberlain and Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/the National Library of Wales.

<sup>1</sup> Brenda Chamberlain, 'Brenda Chamberlain', in Meic Stephens (ed.), *Artists in Wales* (Llandysul, 1971), 43–54 (51). In light of recent decisions to return to the Welsh names of national parks including Bannau Brycheiniog and Eryri, and the politics of these acts of naming, I will use the Welsh Enlli, rather than Bardsey.

on the Caseg Press and publication in Gwyn Jones's *The Welsh Review* and Keidrych Rhys's *Wales*. Although Chamberlain had made her name as an artist in the early years on Enlli—winning Eisteddfod Gold Medals in 1951 and 1953 and exhibiting across Wales and London—she was not yet known as a writer. The publication of her first poetry collection, *The Green Heart* (1958), marked the beginning of her hybrid career as artist-writer and was followed by two memoirs, a novel, and a political play.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on the end of the war in 1971, Chamberlain emphasized the opportunities for repair and recovery afforded by the end of this major conflict, which elsewhere she had described as having 'shatter[ed] the fantasy' of the 'romantic' 1930s.<sup>3</sup> However, Chamberlain's retrospective account of this period obscures a series of ruptures and losses that the war had cost her personally, whether directly or indirectly: the end of her collaborative work with her husband the artist John Petts and her friend the poet Alun Lewis on the Caseg Broad-sheets (November 1941—June 1942); her divorce from Petts in 1943 and the end of her life in Llanllechid; and the loss of Alun Lewis from a gun-shot wound in Burma in 1944.<sup>4</sup>

Lewis's death was officially recorded as an off-duty accident, but may have been by suicide.<sup>5</sup> In 1945 *Poetry* magazine published a moving elegy 'For Alun Lewis' by Chamberlain, which paraphrased a last letter he had written her: 'For he said, surely he would come again / In flesh or ghost, beside me on the hill.'<sup>6</sup> In the poem, Chamberlain brings Lewis home from the 'orange groves' of his overseas postings to the 'tidal' landscapes of Wales. The 'rock' on which 'begins promised pilgrimage' appears to be the evocative, haunted island of Enlli where Lewis's spirit, along with the war's many ghosts, would continue to walk beside her.<sup>7</sup> This article reads Chamberlain's 1962 memoir of life on Enlli, *Tide-race*, as an elegy and lament for these personal losses and as an attempt to reckon with communal post-war grief. In doing so, it positions *Tide-race* alongside other belated works of Second World War literature, particularly by Chamberlain's Welsh contemporaries writing in English, such as David Jones's *The Anathemata* (1952) and Lynette Roberts's *Gods with Stainless Ears* (1951), both of which are characterized by a sustained and richly textured engagement with medieval culture.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere I have written about how the medievalism of Jones's and Roberts's mid-century texts, alongside works like Edwin Morgan's *Beowulf* (1952), 'suggest[s] the particular resonance of the early Middle Ages for the battle-grounds and bombsites of the Second World War and its aftermath in late modernist culture.'<sup>9</sup> As Siriol McAvoy has observed, Welsh writers were at the forefront of this modernist tendency to hold 'up fragments of the medieval past as a kind of talisman against civilization's ruin.'<sup>10</sup> Brenda Chamberlain's experimental memoir is a medieval modern text: it is a work that, as Robert Mills

<sup>2</sup> Brenda Chamberlain, *The Green Heart* (Oxford, 1958); *Tide-race* (London, 1962); *The Water Castle* (London, 1964); *A Rope of Vines* (London, 1965); *Poems with Drawings* (London, 1969); *The Protagonists*, ed. Damian Walford Davies (Cardigan, 2013). Further references to *Tide-race* will be given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Brenda Chamberlain, *Alun Lewis & the Making of the Caseg Broad-sheets, with a letter from Vernon Watkins and a Checklist of the Broad-sheets* (London, 1970), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Alison Smith, *John Petts and the Caseg Press* (Ashgate, 2000); Linda Adams, 'Fieldwork: The Caseg Broad-sheets and the Welsh Anthropologist', *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, 5 (1999), 51–85.

<sup>5</sup> John Pikoulis, *Alun, Gweno & Freda* (Bridgend, 2015), 174–201.

<sup>6</sup> Brenda Chamberlain, 'For Alun Lewis', *Poetry*, 66 (1945), 303.

<sup>7</sup> Chamberlain, 'For Alun'.

<sup>8</sup> Lynette Roberts, *Gods with Stainless Ears* (London, 1951); David Jones, *The Anathemata* (London, 1952). On the relationship between *The Anathemata* and the Second World War, see Neil Corcoran, *The Song of Deeds: A Study of The Anathemata of David Jones* (Cardiff, 1982), 33; and Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge, 2011), 147–56.

<sup>9</sup> Francesca Brooks, *Poet of the Medieval Modern: Reading the Early Medieval Library with David Jones* (Oxford, 2021), 8. On the medievalism of David Jones and Lynette Roberts, see also: Paul Robichaud, *Making the Past Present: David Jones, the Middle Ages, & Modernism* (Washington, DC, 2007); Siriol McAvoy, 'The Presence of the Past: Medieval Encounters in the Writing of Virginia Woolf and Lynette Roberts', PhD thesis, University of Cardiff, 2016. On Old English and mid-twentieth-century poetry more broadly see: Carl Kears, 'Eric Mottram and Old English: Revival and Re-Use in the 1970s', *The Review of English Studies*, 69 (2018), 430–54; Clare A. Lees, 'Old English at the Midcentury: Poetry, Scholarship, and Fiction in Britain in the 1940s and 50s', in R. D. Perry and Benjamin A. Saltzman (eds), *Thinking of the Medieval: Midcentury Intellectuals and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2022), 147–66; Daniel C. Remein, *The Heat of Beowulf* (Manchester, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Siriol McAvoy, "'Crusaders uncross limbs by the green light of flares': Lynette Roberts's Avant-Garde Medievalism', in McAvoy (ed.), *Locating Lynette Roberts: 'always observant and slightly obscure'* (Cardiff, 2019), 121–54 (125). See also: John Goodby and Chris Wiggington, 'Welsh Modernist Poetry', in Neal Alexander and James Moran (eds), *Regional Modernisms* (Edinburgh, 2013), 160–83.

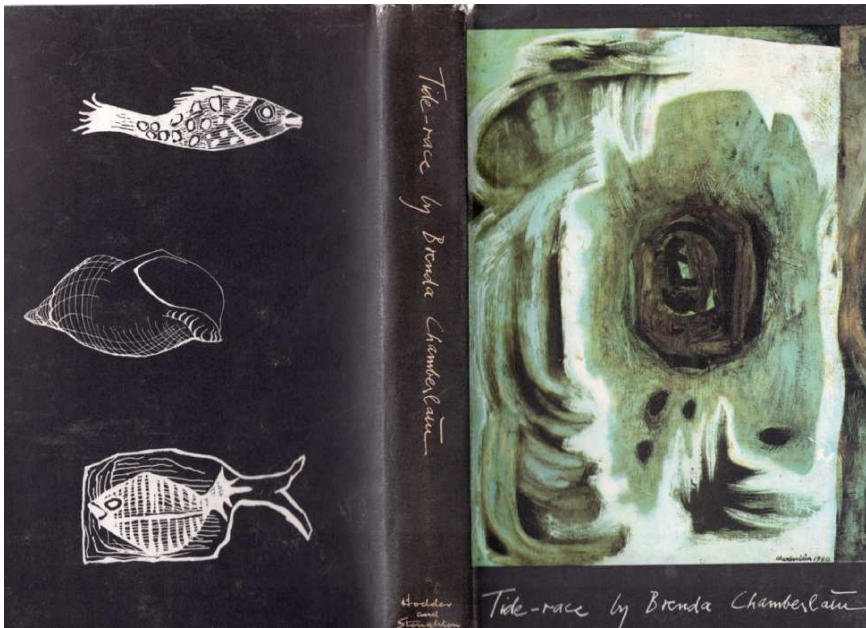


FIG. 1. Cover of Brenda Chamberlain, *Tide-race* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1962). Reproduced with the permission of The Brenda Chamberlain Estate.

puts it in his book on Derek Jarman, ‘pursues the Middle Ages out of bounds’, drawing on the vibrancy of medieval culture to invent new forms for the crises of the present.<sup>11</sup>

*Tide-race* (1962) gathers a range of hybrid material into its orbit, including poetry, prose, pen and ink sketches and reproductions of largescale paintings, presenting the reader with a unique vision of Chamberlain’s life as an artist on Enlli. The dustjacket to the first edition (Fig. 1), with a reproduction of Chamberlain’s abstract painting *The Eye of the Sea*, a handwritten title, and line drawings on the back, presents the memoir as an artist’s book and *objet d’art*, in which abstract and realist forms are collaged in an attempt to convey the island’s own hybrid character as a place of life and labour, and of sustained mythologization. Although *Tide-race* includes fictionalized portraits of the islanders and details daily routines, it is more than a window onto a remote community. It provides an account of the artist’s emotional, imaginative, and aesthetic response to the island, or as John Brannigan describes it, ‘a psychological journey and a mystical quest’.<sup>12</sup> In comparing *Tide-race* to Chamberlain’s journal entries now preserved in the archive, Pippa Marland traces the ‘subtle intensifications of her already semi-mythologised prose’,<sup>13</sup> which pierce naturalist descriptions of the island’s wildlife with folkloric selkies, and counterpoise hard-worn island fishermen with hallucinatory visions, such as that of the ‘neptune beard[ed]’ king with ‘crablike fingers’ (p. 21) encountered on the beach.

The island is not, however, a space of idealized retreat. One of the contentions of this article is that in the post-war period Chamberlain grappled with two major facets of her identity. The first was her identity as a divorced woman and artist, and the second was her relationship to Welshness, both of which can be read in her engagement with the Old English elegies. In

<sup>11</sup> Robert Mills, *Derek Jarman’s Medieval Modern* (Woodbridge, 2018), 2–3. See also Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time* (London, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890–1970* (Edinburgh, 2014), 224.

<sup>13</sup> Pippa Marland, *Ecocriticism and the Island: Readings from the British-Irish Archipelago* (Lanham, 2022), 84.

*Tide-race* Chamberlain rejected a dominant strand of Enlli's medieval history as a male monastic site and chose to translate and adapt the Old English elegies of the tenth-century Exeter Book manuscript: *The Wife's Lament*, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*.<sup>14</sup> The elegies allow Chamberlain to give voice to her grief and sense of isolation, as well as to reflect on the agential power of her island environment. Yet this resourcing of the Old English elegies appears to have gone unrecognized by Chamberlain's critics and readers.

Unlike many of the twentieth-century poets who have come to be known for their translation and adaptation of Old English literature, Chamberlain had not studied Old English at university, and I have found no record of her interest in the literature in her correspondence.<sup>15</sup> Outside of the university, Old English circulated amongst literary creatives with a vitality that is not always traceable: in an unpublished elegy for Dylan Thomas, for example, Lynette Roberts writes of the 'Anglo-Saxon poems' she had given him, in an exchange that has otherwise gone unrecorded.<sup>16</sup> The one trace that does survive in Brenda Chamberlain's archive is a quotation from *Beowulf* written in the margins of a notebook page. I will discuss this archival trace as a prelude to Chamberlain's engagement with the elegies, suggesting how the haunted landscapes of Old English poetry left their mark on her visio-verbal imagination.

Despite her innovative career spanning the visual and the verbal arts, Chamberlain is little known beyond Wales. Her work exists in what Rowena Kennedy-Epstein describes as 'the precarious space between disappearance and visibility in which women's work exists', and is made doubly precarious by the fact that this is Welsh Anglophone women's work.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as Kennedy-Epstein asserts, the archive is 'an extraordinary space to imagine upon and remake within'.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Chamberlain, the archive enables us to read *Tide-race* as a medieval modern text that is deeply ambivalent about what medieval culture means for modern conceptions of identity, specifically Welshness and womanhood. By looking at the drafts of *Tide-race* preserved in Brenda Chamberlain's archive and by considering the notebooks that contain a quotation from *Beowulf*, I will show how Chamberlain rejected the dominant narrative traditions of Ynys Enlli as a male monastic space, and began to look to other sources. In the final two sections of this article, I turn to the elegies to consider the alternative voices Chamberlain sought out in her desire to challenge patriarchal authority. I will look firstly at her use of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* in the portrayal of the character of Cadwaladr, named after another woman resident, the poet and teacher Dilys Cadwaladr who was driven from the island; and finally, I will consider how *The Wife's Lament* enables Chamberlain to give voice to women's experience on the island.

## WELSHNESS AND WOMANHOOD

In the wake of the Second World War, Brenda Chamberlain grappled with two major facets of her identity in *Tide-race*. In this section I explore how her experience as a woman during the war and on Enlli resonates with the Old English elegies, before reflecting on how her treatment of medieval material more broadly provides insight into her conflicted feelings about Welshness. In her 1971 essay Chamberlain claimed that her 'lack of politics [and] anarchic feelings' had led her to Enlli.<sup>19</sup> However, what she encountered on Enlli as a newly single, divorced woman was a politics of a different kind, writ large in the gender inequities of this isolated community. In a

<sup>14</sup> 'The Wanderer', 75–8; 'The Seafarer', 79–83; 'The Wife's Lament', 93–4, in Anne Klinck (ed.), *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal, 1992). Translations are my own.

<sup>15</sup> See Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Lynette Roberts Collection, Container 2, Folder 8, 'A letter to the dead' [nd].

<sup>17</sup> Rowena Kennedy-Epstein, *Unfinished Spirit: Muriel Rukeyser's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY, 2022), 5. See also Kirsti Bohata on the 'precarious and persistently marginal position' of Welsh Anglophone writing: *Postcolonialism Revisited: Writing Wales in English* (Cardiff, 2004), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Kennedy-Epstein, *Unfinished Spirit*, 165.

<sup>19</sup> Chamberlain, *Artists in Wales*, 52.



review of *Tide-race* Edna O'Brien, writing early in her career, observed how the book reveals that the men:

have gone there for various reasons (to be king, to be saint, to be free). The women have gone because they are men's wives and most of them live out their lives making babies and gruel and fish suppers, half-crazed with loneliness.<sup>20</sup>

These gendered experiences of island life can be mapped on to those of the exiles in the Old English elegies where, as Stacy S. Klein observes, for the men 'exile is figured as a loss of place and consignment to perpetual movement', whereas for the women exile is the experience of being 'trapped in place and consigned to interminable stasis'.<sup>21</sup> This was also how many men and women had experienced the Second World War: Chamberlain, for example, remained alone in Llanllechid while Petts, a conscientious objector, was posted to do agricultural work in the south of England.<sup>22</sup> Chamberlain's independence and her ability to imagine herself living as an islander was threatened by the continued reification of these gender roles on Enlli in the post-war period. Early in *Tide-race* she asks herself 'could I dare plunge into the hermit-life, into the fisherman-farmer's? Alone; most certainly not. With a man, perhaps' (p. 16); she eventually settled on Enlli with a partner Jean Van de Bijl, who is fictionalized in the book as 'Paul'.

Brannigan argues that what sets Chamberlain's *Tide-race* apart from its twentieth-century antecedents in archipelagic modernism, such as more ethnographical island books which inspired Chamberlain, like J. M. Synge's *The Aran Islands* (1907) and Hugh McDiarmid's *The Islands of Scotland* (1939), is the fact that the book 'encounters the island, from the outset, as a social space already determined as masculine'.<sup>23</sup> However, what Brannigan and critics including Damian Walford Davies do not recognize is the role that medieval culture plays in Chamberlain's challenge to patriarchal authority on the island.<sup>24</sup> Enlli lies off the southern tip of the Llŷn peninsula in north Wales and is known as the burial place of the bones of 20,000 medieval saints. Marland writes that 'an association with the dead is powerfully inscribed in the island's cultural history', a fact that stands in contrast to the vital materiality of its wildlife as a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Specific Scientific Interest, and as the first Dark Sky Sanctuary in Europe.<sup>25</sup> In line with broader medieval traditions surrounding monastic islands including Iona and Lindisfarne, the remains on Enlli are imagined as belonging exclusively to men, something that will be discussed in more detail below. Although Chamberlain's Homeric and Shakespearean (via *The Tempest*) references represent more overt allusions in *Tide-race*, I argue that the medieval culture of the British and Irish archipelago was a significant resource in challenging a masculine vision of Enlli, which had its origins in the Middle Ages.<sup>26</sup>

Medieval culture is also central to the book's ambivalent negotiation of contemporary Welsh identity. Chamberlain claimed that the pilgrimage to Enlli had 'led me to the Atlantic waves which I had desired all my life, the sea which had been in the blood of my Irish and Manx forebears', retrospectively framing her relocation to the island as a quest for her 'true Celtic roots'.<sup>27</sup> This chimes with Chamberlain's emphasis on the orientation of Enlli in *Tide-race* towards the

<sup>20</sup> Edna O'Brien, 'Hermit's Island', *The Observer*, 21 October 1962.

<sup>21</sup> Stacy S. Klein, 'Gender and the Nature of Exile in Old English Elegies', in Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (eds), *A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes* (University Park, PA, 2006), 113–31 (115). See also: Shari Horner, *The Discourse of Enclosure: Representing Women in Old English Literature* (Albany, NY, 2001), 29–64.

<sup>22</sup> Jill Piercy, *Brenda Chamberlain: Artist and Writer* (Cardigan, 2013 [2019]), 72–3.

<sup>23</sup> Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism*, 226.

<sup>24</sup> Damian Walford Davies, *Cartographies of Culture: New Geographies of Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff, 2012), 90–91. See also Daniel Hughes, 'Breaking up the Traditional Skyline: Writing Modernist Wales in English', PhD thesis, Bangor University, 2018, 240.

<sup>25</sup> Pippa Marland, 'Island of the Dead: Composting Twenty-thousand Saints on Bardsey Island', *Green Letters*, 18 (2014), 78–90 (82); Marland, *Ecocriticism and the Island*, 71.

<sup>26</sup> Marland, *Ecocriticism and the Island*, 76.

<sup>27</sup> Chamberlain, 'Brenda Chamberlain', 51–2.

Wicklow Mountains across the Irish Sea (p. 13), with its back to mainland Wales and to Gwynedd. Yet such an orientation seems out of step with the contemporary contexts of Welsh nationalism. *Tide-race* was published in the same year that Saunders Lewis gave his BBC radio lecture ‘*Tynged yr Iaith*’, ‘The Fate of the Language’, a rallying cry to see the Welsh language as a political instrument. A few months later, and partly in response to Lewis’s lecture, *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*, the Welsh Language Society, a direct-action pressure group that campaigned for the right to use Welsh in all aspects of life, was founded.<sup>28</sup> This cultural shift is not anticipated by *Tide-race*. As the Welsh poet, translator, and cultural critic Tony Conran disparagingly highlights, in *Tide-race*: ‘[Chamberlain] nowhere tells us whether [the islanders] spoke Welsh or English. Indeed, as far as I can find, she does not mention the Welsh language at all, which is surely remarkable for a book about the most westerly part of Welsh Wales’. For Conran, this omission ‘indicates a real limitation of her interests’.<sup>29</sup>

Chamberlain’s relationship to the Welsh language and issues of Welsh identity in *Tide-race* is more complex than Conran acknowledges. In her biography, Jill Piercy notes that on Enlli the islanders were ‘[f]or the most part Welsh speakers [who] found it difficult to express themselves in English and to accept anyone from “foreign” shores’, acknowledging that although Chamberlain was born in Wales she could not speak the language.<sup>30</sup> Yet one way in which the Welsh language is a significant part of the texture of the book, and its evocation of place, is through acts of naming as they relate to local topographical features and houses. Chamberlain uses the Welsh names for features such as the island’s caves, including *Ogof Hir* (p. 77), *Ogof Goch* (p. 88), and *Ogof Lladron* (p. 26).<sup>31</sup> She did not use the actual house names from Enlli, as this would have closely identified her fictional characters with their island counterparts, but her invented names draw on common Welsh place name elements and approximate familiar habits of naming on the island. Enlli has a house called *Carreg Bach*, for example, meaning ‘small rock/stone’, while the island of *Tide-race* has a house called *Clogwyn Bach* ‘small cliff/crag’. The verbal cartography of the island in *Tide-race*, then, is mapped in the first language of Enlli’s community, Welsh. Chamberlain was perhaps more invested in the Welsh language as a distinctive feature of this local place than she was in reading Enlli as a Welsh space where the Welsh language has national or cultural resonance. This distinction aligns her work with the regional interests of late modernist literature more broadly.<sup>32</sup>

The politics of this act of naming are confused and complicated, however, by Chamberlain’s failure to fully anonymize Enlli and its islanders. In the book ‘the island’ is never named, and a draft demonstrates that even Aberdaron, back on the mainland, was replaced with ‘the white village’ in the process of redrafting.<sup>33</sup> Yet for the islanders, who felt exposed and betrayed by the book, and for critics and readers, this anonymization was ultimately ineffectual. Chamberlain had become something of a celebrity resident of Enlli by 1962, having written about her life there for the popular magazine *House & Garden*, and as the subject of an award-winning short film *Island Artist* (1953), by Edgar Ewan Pritchard.<sup>34</sup> Although some reviewers played along with the fiction of the unknown island of *Tide-race*, many more peered curiously through this window into the intimate lives of Enlli’s islanders. In a review for *The Daily Telegraph*, Caradog Pritchard asked if an attempt to anonymize had been made to protect the island from tourism, but concluded: ‘Not much fear of that after reading this often larger-than-life record of in-bred

<sup>28</sup> Richard King, *Brittle with Relics: A History of Wales, 1962–1997* (London, 2022), 25.

<sup>29</sup> Tony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness: Essays on the English Poets of Wales* (Llandysul, 1982), 209.

<sup>30</sup> Piercy, *Brenda Chamberlain*, 160.

<sup>31</sup> RCAHMW, *The List of Historic Place Names of Wales* <<https://historicplacenames.rcahmw.gov.uk/>> accessed 23 Feb 2023.

<sup>32</sup> See Neal Alexander and James Moran on regional modernisms: ‘Introduction’, in *Regional Modernisms*, 1–22.

<sup>33</sup> Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales (Subsequently NLW), Brenda Chamberlain Papers, MS21486C, (2), *Tide-race* (early draft).

<sup>34</sup> Brenda Chamberlain, ‘Brenda Chamberlain’s Bardsey: An Artist-Poet’s Account of her Island Life’, *House & Garden*, April 1959, 71; Edgar Ewan Pritchard, *Island Artist*, 1953 <<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-island-artist-1953-online>> accessed 23 Feb 2023.

savagery and primitive austerity among a salt-crusted, wave-lashed little community.<sup>35</sup> It is a judgment that vividly illustrates why the islanders felt aggrieved by Chamberlain's public portrait of them.

We might conclude that Chamberlain had a stronger commitment to her artistic vision than to the community within which she lived. The exposure of her neighbours and her lack of interest in reflecting on the status of the Welsh language on the island also typifies Chamberlain's status as an outsider to Enlli, as a non-Welsh speaker, and as someone who was increasingly ambivalent about her own identity as a Welsh artist-writer. As John Goodby and Chris Wiggington note, from the 1950s onwards 'tensions within Welsh culture, between a nationalism based on "community", birth, and the Welsh language, and a more pluralistic Anglophone culture' intensified, leading to questions about whether work in English by figures such as R. S. Thomas, David Jones or Lynette Roberts could be regarded as Welsh.<sup>36</sup>

After the Second World War Chamberlain gradually distanced herself from the Welsh cultural nationalism and medievalism that had defined her early poetry and creative projects with Petts and Lewis, which focused on the translation and adaptation of medieval works such as the *Mabinogi* as a kind of vital cultural property.<sup>37</sup> In the writing that followed the publication of *Tide-race* Chamberlain would craft a more European, rather than Welsh or British identity for herself as a writer.<sup>38</sup> Although much critical work on literary medievalism considers the modern engagement with medieval literature as a kind of national, ideological canon—whether to shore up this cultural power or to challenge it—Chamberlain's writing does not register a sense of tension between Old English and Welsh.<sup>39</sup> In *Tide-race* Enlli is an archipelagic space: its location in the currents of the Irish Sea suggests plural connections across Britain, Ireland and Europe, making new word-hoards of medieval material available.<sup>40</sup>

### ENLLI'S MEDIEVAL HISTORY

In one particularly vivid episode in *Tide-race*, the bones of some of the 20,000 saints thought to be buried on the island are accidentally disinterred. Chamberlain writes:

On August the fifteenth (the Vigil of our Lady's Assumption) Cadwaladr, while digging in his garden, disinterred the bones of a saint; then he came upon many skeletons; skulls and thigh bones, teeth all brown like pre-Columbian pottery; shards that crumbled at the touch of spade and fingers, even as the air flowed over them ...

By evening, we had grown disgusted with ourselves for having handled the skeletons, for it was clear, the warning on the saints' cross in the churchyard:

"Respect the remains of 20,000 saints buried nearby: *in hoc loco requiescant in pace.*"

...

Feverishly, we washed and washed our hands, to deny having touched the bones. (p. 181)

Having uncovered Enlli's medieval remains, Chamberlain recoils from the discovery, feeling both disgust and a sense of transgression. Described as brown 'like pre-Columbian pottery', the bones are also instantly made unrecognizable as an artefact from the medieval past. The remains are in any case unstable—if they have agency, it resides in their desire not to persist outside the

<sup>35</sup> Caradog Pritchard, 'Welsh Island Life', *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 September 1962.

<sup>36</sup> Goodby and Wiggington, 'Welsh Modernist Poetry', 161.

<sup>37</sup> See Brenda Chamberlain: 'Poem for Five Airmen', *The Welsh Review*, 3.1 (1944); 'Blodeuwedd', *Wales*, 6 (1946), 19–21; 'The Dead Land', in Wrey Gardiner (ed.), *Grey Wall Stories* (London, 1945), 19–23. See also: Joshua Davies, 'The Middle Ages as Property: Beowulf, Translation and the Ghosts of Nationalism', *postmedieval*, 10 (2019), 137–50.

<sup>38</sup> Walford Davies, *Cartographies*, 125–71, especially the discussion of *The Water-Castle* and the identity of its main character at 127.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Chris Jones, *Fossil Poetry: Anglo-Saxon and Linguistic Nativism in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism*, 8–9.



clutches of the earth. Chamberlain shows no inclination to preserve or record. In contrast to the literary excavation work of other twentieth-century writers such as Jones or Seamus Heaney, for whom the approach to medieval history is archaeological in character, Chamberlain is happy to let buried saints lie.<sup>41</sup> This attitude to the medieval past can also be traced in successive drafts of *Tide-race* as they are preserved in the archive. Chamberlain seeks out something more intangible in place of these relics of Enlli's male monastic community; as she affirms towards the end of *Tide-race*, 'if only there was a tongue still vocal in the dust' (p. 220). In this section I turn to the archive to explore the exhumed bones of Enlli's medieval history, which Chamberlain eventually erased from the final draft of *Tide-race*.

There are two drafts of *Tide-race* preserved in the archive at the National Library of Wales: NLW MS 21486C—*Tide-race*: early draft [1962] and NLW MS 21487E—*Tide-race*: final draft [1962]. The variation between the draft and the final typescript for the published book is largely visible in portions of text that have been crossed out and subsequently edited from the book. These crossings-out reveal Chamberlain's desire not to be a 'Baedeker', or tour-guide, but they also result in the rejection of a strand of Enlli's textual identity: primarily its medieval and patriarchal aspects.<sup>42</sup> Enlli is imagined as a key locus of island monasticism in Wales and an important pilgrimage site: three pilgrimages to the island are said to equal one to Rome.<sup>43</sup> However, its history is defined by a mix of oral accounts, sparse archaeological finds, and later medieval records that make its early history difficult to parse. Although St Cadfan was said to have established a Celtic monastic college on Enlli in AD 516, for example, the first contemporary reference to Enlli is in the eleventh-century *Chronicle of the Princes* (*Brut y Tywysogion*), and the earliest surviving ecclesiastical ruins are from the thirteenth century.<sup>44</sup>

Enlli also lays claim to many significant Welsh saints and even to Merlin, who according to legend was imprisoned in a glass tower in one of the island's caves. From the end of the eighteenth century until 1925 the island had a crowned king, representative of a more secular mythologizing of male power. Stories and legends about the island have been continually revisited, especially in nineteenth- and twentieth-century attempts to revive monastic life and frame early Welsh history as an age of saints akin to that of Ireland; indeed, they are still a central part of Enlli's status as a locus of 'faith tourism' in Wales and Britain.<sup>45</sup>

The early introduction to Enlli in the draft (NLW MS21486C) shows Chamberlain drawing on a conventional origin point for the island as a Christian pilgrimage site. However, Chamberlain's diligent attention to historical and medieval detail was abandoned in the redrafting process. In the draft Chamberlain describes the island as a sanctuary from the massacre of the monks of Bangor Iscoed by King Aethelfrith in 615 in a reference to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>46</sup> There are also references to Giraldus Cambrensis, the potential Viking origins of 'Bardsey', and the commentary on the island from the twelfth-century *Book of Llandaff*.<sup>47</sup> Letters sent to the poet and editor Raymond Garlick also attest to Chamberlain's early dedication to her historical research. A 1945 letter mentions research notes already sent to Chamberlain by Garlick, and makes a further request of him—'Could you please ... look up in Sir Thomas Mallory's *Morte D'Arthur* the exact reference to Merlin's deposition on Enlli of the thirteen treasures of Britain?

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Christine Finn, *Past Poetic: Archaeology in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney* (London, 2004); Brooks, *Poet of the Medieval Modern*, 177–88.

<sup>42</sup> In the draft she quotes D. H. Lawrence in 'Sea and Sardinia', 'for the rest, I am not a Baedeker'. Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS21486C, *Tide-race* (early draft), (16).

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan M. Wooding, 'Island Monasticism in Wales: Towards an Historical Archaeology', *Studia Celtica*, 54 (2020), 1–28 (1).

<sup>44</sup> Wooding, 'Island Monasticism', 7; 9.

<sup>45</sup> Huw Pryce, 'The Irish and Welsh Middle Ages in the Victorian Period', in Joanne Parker and Corinna Wagner (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism* (Oxford, 2020), 215–34 (224).

<sup>46</sup> Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), 134–43, ii.2.

<sup>47</sup> Aberystwyth, NLW, Brenda Chamberlain Papers, MS21486C, (3), (8), (13–14), and (19) *Tide-race* (early draft).

Could you please quote the words in a letter?’<sup>48</sup> It is striking to see the extent to which Chamberlain’s access to Enlli’s history was mediated from her remote position, a distance inflected by geography and by gender: a fact that recalls Lynette Roberts’s struggles to access materials in the National Library of Wales and the Carmarthen County Library in the 1940s.<sup>49</sup> Chamberlain’s decision to leave this research behind suggests a recognition that forms of knowledge other than that of published authorities and cloistered academic enterprise might instead be privileged in her memoir.

Although some of the historical, medieval detail about Enlli survived the editing process, Chamberlain treats it with scepticism. The island is described as a ‘place of pilgrimage to the neophyte’ (p. 19) and when Chamberlain invokes the litany of saints associated with Enlli she asks, ‘Who can distinguish between the dust of the saint and the lecher? Like bell-sounds, their spoken names: Lleuddad, Dafydd, Deiniol, Beuno, Dyfrig, Beneurog’ (p. 18). Chamberlain shows little reverence for the spiritual authority of the island’s dominant histories, and as will be discussed below, this same scepticism inflects her translation and adaptation of the man-voiced Old English elegies. The ideologies inscribed onto Enlli before Chamberlain’s arrival were largely spiritual and patriarchal. However, it is worth noting that from the mid-twentieth century to the present, Enlli’s most famous residents have been women: the Eisteddfod winner and schoolteacher Dilys Cadwaladr (1902–1979), Brenda Chamberlain, Sister Helen Mary who lived the solitary life on the island from 1969 to 1992, the poet Christine Evans (1943–), and the novelist Fflur Dafydd (1978–). Although Chamberlain left a complicated legacy behind, she is now part of the pilgrimage trail on Enlli: Carreg Fawr, the house where she lived, preserves the murals she painted on the walls, *Tide-race* is available to buy from the gift shop, and an exhibition about her life and work is open to visitors.

The fate of one of these women, Dilys Cadwaladr, and Chamberlain’s sense of the injustice of her treatment on the island are central to the use she makes of the Old English elegies in *Tide-race*. Dilys Cadwaladr gives her name to the character of Cadwaladr, a fictionalized version of Thomas Griffiths. Like Chamberlain, Dilys Cadwaladr did not conform to the convention of island women living as housewives and homemakers. In 1953 she became the first woman to win the Bardic Silver Crown at the National Eisteddfod in the same year that Chamberlain won her second gold medal for one of her paintings *The Cristin Children*.<sup>50</sup> Cadwaladr’s success was widely reported in the British media in outlets including *The Illustrated London News*, where it also featured amongst a round-up of ‘triumphs’ for ‘Women in the Public Eye, 1952–62’ in 1963.<sup>51</sup> In 1956 *The Times* described Dilys Cadwaladr as ‘the bardess who blazed a trail for women poets by carrying off the silver crown award’, suggesting the significant cultural impact that her success was seen to have had in Britain and Wales.<sup>52</sup>

Enlli could not claim Dilys Cadwaladr’s success as its own: although she had lived as a fisherman and schoolteacher for several years between 1946 and 1948 on the island, briefly overlapping with Chamberlain’s arrival, she was ‘compelled to leave [Enlli ...] owing to what she regarded as ... persecution’, as Walford Davies writes, by Thomas Griffiths. In *Tide-race* Chamberlain gives Griffiths the pseudonym Cadwaladr, which according to Walford Davies represents an act of ‘masterly (as it were) sisterly revenge’—naming him after the woman he drove from the island.<sup>53</sup> Dilys Cadwaladr can be seen to represent one of the many revenants in Chamberlain’s haunted memoir. I will return to her in the final section of this article, exploring

<sup>48</sup> Aberystwyth, NLW, Raymond Garlick Papers, MS24149E, (4) Correspondence (incl. B.C.), 44–85.

<sup>49</sup> Lynette Roberts, ‘May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1946’, in *Diaries, Letters, Recollections*, ed. Patrick McGuinness (Manchester, 2008), 78–80.

<sup>50</sup> *The Illustrated London News*, 15 August 1953; Piercy, *Brenda Chamberlain*, 221.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Women in the Public Eye, 1952–62: Some Triumphs’, *The Illustrated London News*, 12 October 1963.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Joyous Greetings at Aberdare’, *The Times*, 7 August 1965.

<sup>53</sup> Walford Davies, *Cartographies*, 110.

how Chamberlain re-inscribes the history of her persecution onto the island by drawing on the language of *The Wife's Lament*.

As the collection of excised medieval references from the *Tide-race* drafts demonstrates, Enlli is gendered as male when Chamberlain encounters it, not simply because contemporary island life crystallizes traditional gender dynamics, but also because of a longer history of male monastic figures and medieval writers who settled the island and authorized that settlement in the historical record. Enlli's status as the resting place of communities of male monastics aligns it with a wider tradition of textual accounts of medieval island spaces. On Columba's Iona, for example, women were said to have been banished to a separate island, *Eilean nam Ban*, and in her study of *The Lindisfarne Gospels* Michelle Brown notes that a parallel tradition 'has arisen which implies that ... women were not permitted on the island [of Lindisfarne] from the time of St. Cuthbert'. Brown notes that this monastic ideal is refuted by a lack of evidence in the early record, as well as by material evidence such as the namestone of a woman called Osgyth from the eighth century.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, archaeological discoveries on Enlli, which have found women as well as men buried in the cemetery, suggest that the textual account of a 'desert island' where women were not in residence was a literary ideal rather than a lived reality.<sup>55</sup>

As the drafts in the archive at the National Library of Wales attest, Chamberlain freed herself of the obligation to exhaustively include Enlli's medieval history and emphasized her own unique vision of the island: this vision is more subjective and a hybrid of fact and fiction, experience and imagination. In doing so she resists an impulse to read Enlli as both a man's space and as a Welsh nationalist or cultural space. In this sense she also radically diverges from the tradition of 'island writing' that had inspired her in the 1940s, when she was writing out quotations from MacDiarmid's *The Islands of Scotland* and regaling correspondents with accounts of her reading of Synge.<sup>56</sup> As we will see, Chamberlain's use of Old English poetry in *Tide-race* speaks to the liberating creative potential afforded by thinking beyond national canons and of attending to women's voices.

### BEOWULF AND OLD ENGLISH IN CHAMBERLAIN'S ARCHIVE

Before looking at Chamberlain's adaptation of the Old English elegies in her prose, it is worth examining the evidence that exists for Chamberlain's knowledge of Old English literature and language. Chamberlain does not fit the model of some of our most canonical examples of Old English medievalism, having not studied the language at university. However, her use of Old English sources is strongly rooted in a sense of affinity between the landscapes of this early medieval poetry and her own twentieth-century island off the coast of Britain: as she writes in *Tide-race*, 'This is a land that hoards its past and merges all of time in the present' (p. 28).<sup>57</sup> There is no archived catalogue of Chamberlain's library, and I have not found any reference to her reading of Old English in correspondence.<sup>58</sup> However, there is a tantalizing trace in a notebook, catalogued as dating from 1941 when she was travelling in the West Highlands of Scotland, demonstrating Chamberlain's contact with Old English literature in the original language through *Beowulf*. Some of these diaries and notes made in Scotland, including those surrounding a *Beowulf* quotation in NLW MS 21504B, Sketches (1941), were rewritten and translated to Enlli in *Tide-race*. We can see, then, that the imaginative connections Chamberlain

<sup>54</sup> Michelle Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe* (London, 2003), 23.

<sup>55</sup> Jonathan M. Wooding, 'Island and Coastal Churches in Medieval Wales and Ireland', in Karen Jankulak and Jonathan M. Wooding (eds), *Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 2007), 201–28 (223; 226).

<sup>56</sup> Aberystwyth, NLW, Brenda Chamberlain Papers, MS 21504B, Sketches (1941), 7–8.; Aberystwyth, NLW, John Petts Papers, MS 23207 F, Brenda Chamberlain letters, Letter from Brenda Chamberlain to John Petts, 17 April 1941 (80).

<sup>57</sup> See also Kears on Eric Mottram's *Herne* and the multi-temporality of place, 'Eric Mottram and Old English', 436.

<sup>58</sup> On the libraries of Jones and Morgan as resources for exploring twentieth-century medievalism, see: Brooks, *Poet of the Medieval Modern*, and Jones, *Strange Likeness*.

was forging between the landscapes of Enlli and Old English poetry extended beyond the exilic spaces of the elegies.

Chamberlain's notebooks are hybrid documents. In testament to her dual practice as writer and visual artist, she moves freely in the notebooks between diary entries, written drafts, sketches, and paintings. At the bottom of a page in NLW MS 21504B, Sketches (1941), Chamberlain has written out a line and a half of Old English from *Beowulf*.<sup>59</sup> The lines are written diagonally as if jotted down hastily and circled in pencil to suggest that they do not necessarily bear a relation to the rest of the page. Chamberlain's note reads: 'thær mæg nihta gehwæm nith-wundor seon, fyr on flode.' There are some scribal errors in Chamberlain's note, which perhaps reveal that she was transcribing something heard or jotting down remembered words. This impression of Chamberlain's transcription brings us back with a jolt of asynchrony to the original manuscript of the *Beowulf* poem, the Nowell Codex, and the perceived errors of its scribes, as well as the fire damage that renders some portions unreadable, compounding the manuscript's status as an 'imperfect copy'.<sup>60</sup>

The quotation corresponds to lines 1365–6a: 'Pær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon, / fyr on flode' ['There every night a terrifying wonder can be seen, the water burns'.<sup>61</sup> This forms part of King Hrothgar's speech as he details what is known of the threat to Heorot from Grendel and his mother; these 'micle mearcstapan moras healdan / ellorgæstas' ['large border-steppers, ruling the moors, alien spirits'] (ll. 1348–9a) who 'tread the exile tracks' ('wræclastas træd' l. 1352b) and live in a 'hidden land' ('dygel lond' l. 1357b). Although the note is separated from the rest of the page in Chamberlain's notebook, the connections between the material found there are suggestive. It is possible to see why these lines from *Beowulf* appealed to Chamberlain in this imaginative moment, when she found herself recording her experiences in the desolate moors of the western highlands of Scotland.

To the left of the note is another fragment of text, an aborted poem by Chamberlain perhaps: 'They say there was a woman once brought forth / a manchild in the hollow where I lie.' This riddle offers an uncanny echo of the lines in *Beowulf*, which come only a little before those quoted by Chamberlain. In *Beowulf* these lines introduce Grendel and his mother as mysteriously familiar though unreadable figures.<sup>62</sup>

Dæra oðer wæs,  
 þæs þe hie gewislicost gewitan meahton,  
 idese onlicnes; oðer earmsceapen  
 on weres wæstmum  
 (ll. 1349b–52a)

[‘One of them was, as far as they could tell, in the likeness of a woman; the other misshapen thing, in the form of man’s offspring’]

In fact, the echo is so uncanny that I would argue Chamberlain's note represents an explicit paraphrase of the original. Chamberlain's hybrid compound 'manchild' suggests an ambiguity about the identity of the woman's offspring. Similarly, in *Beowulf*, Grendel and his mother take ambiguous forms that compound a sense of unease. Grendel's Mother appears in *onlicnes* the 'likeness' of a woman, a word that encourages us to dwell both on similitude and uncanny

<sup>59</sup> Aberystwyth, NLW, Brenda Chamberlain Papers, MS 21504B, Sketches (1941).

<sup>60</sup> See Simon Thomson, *Communal Creativity in the Beowulf Manuscript: Towards a History of Reception for the Nowell Codex* (Leiden, 2018), 1.

<sup>61</sup> F. R. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Boston, MA, 1950). Translations are my own.

<sup>62</sup> See Gillian R. Overing, 'Beowulf on Gender', *New Medieval Literatures*, 12 (2010), 1–22 (1; 3); and James Paz, 'Eschere's Head, Grendel's Mother, and the Sword That Isn't a Sword: Unreadable Things in *Beowulf*', *Exemplaria*, 25 (2013), 231–51.

difference. Although Grendel is described as taking the form of man's offspring, he is also *earm-sceapen*—a compound formed of *earm* 'miserable, wretched' and *sceapen* 'shaped'—wretchedly misshapen. As many critics have suggested, one of the most disturbing things about Grendel here is the question of his origins: Gillian R. Overing writes, for example, that Grendel is a 'doubtful male, not just because of his monstrous appearance, but also because the human community do not know who his father is.'<sup>63</sup> In Chamberlain's paraphrase, the Grendelkin are not distorted monsters, as we often find in *Beowulf* translations and adaptations; she instead conveys the sense of the original poem's more haunting and intriguing human-like figures.<sup>64</sup>

The major part of the notebook page on which we find the *Beowulf* quotation and Chamberlain's paraphrase is devoted to draft notes for what would become a collaborative article with Petts.<sup>65</sup> In the notebook Chamberlain describes her own expedition out into the peat-moors, a setting with similarities to the moorland heath where Grendel and his mother are said to roam:

There is a rough cart track across the peat-moss for about two miles – then there is nothing but the naked cliffs rising sheer from the green Atlantic, with boggy peat moss running inland to the hills. ... And I minded me of what my cousin had said one clear moonlight night in autumn when we were abroad late on the mountain.

What would you do if the great God was to come striding across the hills & we facing him in the white moonshine?

I thought of my old imagining, of the huge man with but one leg who walked massively among the mountains with such a torment in his mind that he could never take rest.<sup>66</sup>

Chamberlain's vision of a place where there is 'nothing' but the 'naked cliffs rising sheer' and the peat-moss that runs 'inland to the hills' finds a close parallel in the description of the 'dygel lond' of the Grendelkin where 'ðær fyrgenstream / under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð' ['a mountain-stream winds down under the darkness of the cliffs'] (ll.1359b–60) and 'wulfhleoþu, windige næssa' ['wolf-hills, windy-crags'] (l. 1358) mark the fens. Alexandra Bolintineanu argues that the 'Beowulf-poet evokes wonder and terror by placing monsters in spaces that are secret, unstable, and unknowable, in their geography, ethnography, metaphysics, and cultural affiliation.'<sup>67</sup> Chamberlain conjures an alien wilderness where fear incites the imagination, suggesting a debt to the early medieval poem. Her confession of an 'old imagining' of a 'huge man' who walks the mountains in a state of restlessness, is haunted by the *Beowulf* poem's vision of Grendel roving beyond language and beyond community in a state of constant turmoil. In *Tide-race* Cadwaladr is gripped by a similar tormented restlessness.

This brief example of Chamberlain's reworking of Old English is characteristic of her broader engagement with the language and literature in her writing from the 1940s through to the early 1960s. Old English poetry is a key source in Chamberlain's island imagination, creating unexpected resonances in direct translations, paraphrases or by providing a particular vocabulary, tone or atmosphere. Chamberlain responds to Old English as a visual artist, able to hoard the vibrant material of this early medieval literature and refashion it in her text. In Chamberlain's first poetry collection *The Green Heart* (1958) images of drowned men, lovers in exile across

<sup>63</sup> Gillian R. Overing, 'The Women of Beowulf: A Context for Interpretation', in Peter S. Baker (ed.), *Beowulf: Basic Readings* (New York, NY, 1995), 219–60 (223).

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin A. Saltzman, 'Secrecy and the Hermeneutic Potential in Beowulf', *PMLA*, 133 (2018), 36–55 (37).

<sup>65</sup> Brenda Chamberlain and John Petts, 'From Other Hills (Letters from the Western highlands, with Wood-engravings by the Writers)', *The Welsh Review*, 2 (1939), 197–205.

<sup>66</sup> Aberystwyth, NLW, Brenda Chamberlain Papers, MS 21504B, Sketches (1941).

<sup>67</sup> Alexandra Bolintineanu, 'Declarations of Unknowing in Beowulf', *Neophilologus*, 100 (2016), 631–47 (632).



the ocean, and ‘brine stung’ lamentation recur.<sup>68</sup> There are several examples of direct quotation or allusion to Old English—such as the ‘the whale’s way’ in ‘Fisherman Husband’<sup>69</sup>—and Old English poetry is clearly one source of a particular mood or texture in Chamberlain’s littoral imagination. The elegies also provide a model for individual subjectivities, or types of experience, such as the isolated exile or the lamenting woman, and a set of images: of loneliness, of wild consolation, of dread or sorrow.

### THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES

Before Chamberlain has invoked the saints, the hermits or the fishermen, she begins *Tide-race* with a lyric ‘I’ and a call for attention that links her voice to a medieval modern chorus of lamentation. This chorus finds its locus in the Old English poetic corpus. Chamberlain writes: ‘LISTEN: I have found the home of my heart. I could not eat; I could not think straight any more; so I came to this solitary place and lay in the sun’ (p. 16). The memoir’s opening directly recalls, both visually and verbally, the HWÆT, ‘LISTEN’, that begins *Beowulf*, and riffs on the elegiac openings of *The Seafarer*, ‘Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgiedd wrecan’ [‘I can sing my own true story’], and *The Wife’s Lament*, ‘Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre, / minre sylfre sið’ [‘I sing this song full of grief, / full of sorrow about myself’]. In each case, these Old English poems, like Chamberlain’s memoir, begin with the first-person singular pronoun to invite the listener’s attention and promise a disclosure that recalls Old English ideas about the enclosure of the mind.<sup>70</sup> Although Chamberlain’s opening hints at the possibility of contentment—the return of her appetite and the ability to think again—it also obliquely references the grief that has disturbed her and driven her to solitude, framing the memoir as a post-war lamentation.

Chamberlain’s most direct adaptation of the Old English elegies comes in her reflection on the flaws of another islander. This section explores Chamberlain’s use of two man-voiced elegies, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, and her invocation and critique of the Exeter Book’s exiles as a means of destabilizing male authority on Enlli. Chamberlain’s memoir includes a substantial cast of characters based on the islanders who were her neighbours. One figure, however, becomes a central antagonist in the narrative. Cadwaladr, the fisherman-farmer who claims bitter control of the island, is introduced first as an ally to Chamberlain and her partner Paul. However, it soon becomes clear that Cadwaladr rules both his family and the broader island community through tyranny and manipulation. The narrator and Paul eventually break away from Cadwaladr to form a union with the other islanders, who have been anticipating this shift in loyalties.

Although Chamberlain does not explicitly signal her use of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, in his fictionalized form Cadwaladr represents an adaptation of these elegiac voices. This adaptation can be seen most directly in the extended verbal portrait of Cadwaladr, which is introduced around the mid-way point of *Tide-race*. Three aspects of Chamberlain’s adaptation in this passage will be explored—vocabulary, imagery, and character. Each contributes to an elegiac mood indebted to Old English poetry. Here is the passage at length:

There were many weak places in his armour; times of paralysing depression when he would sit for long periods head in arms, closed away from the world; times when he might be plotting a subtle devilry or be gripped by the torment of remorse.

In a wild mood, he would wander the mountainside; his heart’s restlessness denying him peace; but then, no man is so contented with life that he does not at times grow eager to break with the sameness of his days, to seek green immortality in troughs of the tideway.

<sup>68</sup> Chamberlain, ‘Lament’, in *The Green Heart*, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Chamberlain, ‘Fisherman Husband’, in *The Green Heart*, 25.

<sup>70</sup> Britt Mize, ‘The Representation of the Mind as Enclosure in Old English Poetry’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 35 (2006), 57–90.

The wife who sits at home before the red hearth does not know with what endurance he faces danger in paths of exile.

A seabird in its breast shakes out its wings; lifts its feet from the ledge of his heart; flies out with the ebb and returns on the strength of the flood-tide that pours into seal caves, over the jasper shore. It leaves its shadows on the waters that surround land, follows the curve of the earth, and comes back to its nest in his heart.

This bird, not to be denied, torments and heals the heart of him who now by the pole star, now by the sun at noon, guides his craft over whale-paths. (pp. 94–5)

In the passage above, Chamberlain casts Cadwaladr as a seafarer whose life upon the island is defined by ‘endurance’ on the ‘paths of exile’. This phrase is a clear echo of the voice of *The Seafarer* who tells us ‘hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ / winter wunade wræccan lastum,’ (ll. 14–15) [‘how I, miserable and gloomy on the ice cold sea, / endured a winter on the exile’s path’]. *The Wanderer* also opens with the description of an ‘anhaga’ or ‘solitary one’ who:

þeah þe he modcearig  
geond lagulade longe sceolde  
hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ,  
wadan wræclastas:  
(ll. 2b–5a)

[‘although he anxious / across the sea-way, long had to / stir the ice-cold sea with his hands, / travel the paths of exile’]

Chamberlain’s broader characterization of her neighbours as ‘fisherman-farmers with feet on the earth and hands in the sea’ (p. 14) might be an echo of the strikingly physical image of *The Wanderer* stirring the sea with his hands. Although the extremities of cold and ice are not suffered by Cadwaladr, his life on the island is framed by Chamberlain as one lived upon the wild sea and in exile, binding Cadwaladr with the Old English exile of the Exeter Book poems. This is a damning portrait of the character and a subversion of the Old English heroic exile, which I suggest (following Walford Davies) is inflected by Chamberlain’s frustration at the treatment of Dilys Cadwaladr.<sup>71</sup>

Much of Chamberlain’s memoir is underpinned by a distinctive coastal vocabulary determined by the environmental conditions and ecology of Enlli. In the passage above we can recognize particular words and compounds drawn from an Old English word-hoard. Chamberlain directly borrows ‘whale-paths’, as in *The Seafarer*’s ‘hwælweg’ [‘whale-way’] (l. 63a), for example. In an extension of this borrowing, she imitates a tendency in Old English to focus special linguistic energy on the invention of compounds related to the sea or bodies of water: in the passage above we have the examples ‘tideway’ and ‘flood-tide’ in variation of the memoir’s title ‘Tide-race.’<sup>72</sup> I would go so far as to suggest that ‘troughs of the tideway’ represents a Modern English translation of an Old English alliterative half-line.

This vocabulary gives way to a more extended imitation of the tone of a particular expression in the elegies. A good example of this can be seen in Chamberlain’s ‘no man is so contented with life that he does not at times grow eager to break with the sameness of his days.’ This has no exact source in the elegies, but nevertheless might fool the reader into believing it is a translation, so flawlessly does it imitate the syntax of the gnomic wisdom and maxims that often feature in these poems: for example, ‘Forþon ne mæg weorþan wis wer ær he age / wintra dæl in woruldrice’

<sup>71</sup> Walford Davies, *Cartographies of Culture*, 110.

<sup>72</sup> See Sebastian Sobocki, *The Sea and Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge, 2007), 45.

(*The Wanderer*, ll. 64–5a) [‘for no man may become wise, before he possesses / a share of winters in this world’]. Although the maxim in *The Wanderer* emphasizes the importance of experience and the value of endurance in a spiritual sense, Chamberlain is interested in a more perverse tendency towards self-destruction that arises from the ‘heart’s restlessness’ of Cadwaladr’s spirit. This tendency aligns Cadwaladr with the speaker in *The Seafarer*, such that Chamberlain’s maxim captures the spirit of longing contained in the 124 lines of that poem. To offer one example, we are told of how ‘monað modes lust mæla gehwylce, / ferð to feran,’ (ll. 36–7b) [‘my mind’s wish urges, every season / my spirit to go forth,’]. The desire to be out upon the ocean, even though this life is perilous and arduous, connects Cadwaladr and the Seafarer across the space of centuries. Chamberlain uses *The Seafarer* to ask why a man might be compelled to live this way.

In Chamberlain’s portrait Cadwaladr’s spirit is twinned with that of a seabird who ‘shakes out its wings; lifts its feet from the ledge of his heart’ and ‘flies out with the ebb’ before returning to the nest the bird has claimed there. Chamberlain’s image develops a passage in *The Seafarer* in which the speaker tells the listener how his spirit, or mind, flies out from his body across the ocean like the seabirds he has been observing in isolation:

Forþon nu min hyge hweorfed ofer hreþerlocan,  
 min modsefa mid mereflode,  
 ofer hwæles eþel hweorfed wide,  
 eorþan sceatas; cymed eft to me  
 gifre ond grædig, gilled anfloga,  
 hweted on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum,  
 ofer holma gelagu;  
 (ll. 58–64a)

[‘And now my spirit flies from my breast, / my mind travels over the seafood, / over the whale’s territory, it wanders wide / between the corners of the earth; returns to me / hungry and greedy, the lone-flier screeches, / compels the unresisting heart to journey / over the ocean’s flood’]

In *The Seafarer* the comparison with a seabird is implied in the word ‘anfloga’, a solitary or lonely flier, which enables the spirit to gain a vast bird’s eye view of the earth. However, Chamberlain makes the metaphor more explicit, seeing the compulsion of the spirit as expressed in the Old English—*hweted* is a conjugation of the verb *hwettan* meaning ‘to whet, to incite, to excite’—as a form of possession by the seabird, which compels Cadwaladr to live a life traversing the ‘whale-paths.’<sup>73</sup> The bird’s desires ambivalently ‘torment’ and ‘heal’ Cadwaladr. Although we do not know what the consequences of Cadwaladr’s denial of the seabird might be, this implicit threat fits with a broader impression in *Tide-race* that Enlli belongs to the birds (p. 20). In the Exeter Book elegies, as Michael J. Warren writes, seabirds feature as ‘metaphorical images for Christian ascension and transformation in profound contemplations envisaging ... the longed-for move from here to there.’<sup>74</sup> However, Chamberlain takes the spiritual resonance of the Old English image and secularizes it so that there is no possibility for Cadwaladr of a journey beyond the earth to a higher plane. In Chamberlain’s vision endurance and suffering are interminable: this is a bleak judgment on Cadwaladr’s character and the island’s association with pilgrimage and spiritual reward.

<sup>73</sup> ‘hwettan’, in *The Bosworth-Toller* <<https://bosworthtoller.com/20147>> accessed 23 Feb 2023.

<sup>74</sup> Michael J. Warren, ‘Native Foreigners: Migrating Seabirds and the Pelagic Soul in *The Seafarer*’, *English Studies*, 98 (2017), 825–45 (826).

The ‘weak places’ Chamberlain details in Cadwaladr’s armour offer moods that read like decontextualized images from the elegies. ‘[G]ripped by the torment of remorse’ evokes those moments of reflection on past joys and pleasures that recur in *The Wanderer* (see, for example, ll. 34–48). Cadwaladr’s experience of ‘times of paralysing depression’ moves us from a generic image of a lamenting exile to a more specific vision of a man who ‘would sit for long periods head in arms, closed away from the world’, in an echo of *The Wanderer*’s valorisation of locking up thoughts and feelings until you can know them better (ll. 11b–14). This virtue is epitomized in its conclusion with: ‘Swa cwæð snottor on mode; gesæt him sundor æt rune’ (l. 111) [‘So spoke the wise-one in his mind; where he sat apart in consultation’]. ‘Run’ has special significance in Old English: the Bosworth-Toller highlights a range of meanings including ‘a secret’, ‘mystery or magic’, ‘of that which is written’, but it can also refer specifically to the mystery of the Christian faith.<sup>75</sup> In *Tide-race* this habit of sitting ‘closed away from the world’ is not a virtue that indicates wisdom or provides access to a higher mystery, but a show of masculine hostility that enables Cadwaladr to manipulate the other islanders.

I will deal with a final and more insidious trait, the ‘plotting of a subtle devilry’ in the section below as it finds its source in *The Wife’s Lament*, but what is already evident is how Chamberlain has changed the orientation of these man-voiced elegies in her portrait of Cadwaladr. The spirituality of purpose that we find in *The Wanderer* or *The Seafarer* is absent, along with the sense of the exile as a figure of wisdom whose endurance is a necessary sacrifice for spiritual revelation. Chamberlain shows Cadwaladr destructively consumed by his own solitude without purpose on an island where religion is no longer the central organizing principle of life.

In invoking the figure of the Old English exile, Chamberlain is invested in challenging the male coding of the island, and in deromanticizing its modern fisherman-farmers and pilgrims. Although Cadwaladr’s name may have come from a former islander, it is also the name of a seventh-century king from Chamberlain’s native Gwynedd. Cadwaladr became a legendary figure in prophetic poetry, including *Armes Prydein Vawr*, where it is said that he will return with another ancient king, Cynan of Brittany, to help the Britons defeat the Saxons.<sup>76</sup> Chamberlain’s gendered critique of Cadwaladr therefore has a nationalist resonance, shattering the fantasy of prophetic heroism. Indeed, this characterizes Chamberlain’s broader approach to her male protagonists and their nostalgic idealization of the medieval past. Although Cadwaladr does not idealize a medieval model of seafaring directly, and this is Chamberlain’s own association, elsewhere a nostalgic idealization of the medieval past by men is skewered. Chamberlain refers to the disillusionment of a character called Friedrich, for example, when he does not get what he desires: ‘to sink himself in the past; to walk a Celtic shore, led on by long-footed maidens with anaemic faces; to be handed in and out of boats by bowing-from-waist boatmen versed in the utterances of Taliessin’ (p. 44). This vision both medievalizes and romanticizes the relationship between the landscape and its history of human settlement. Chamberlain astutely diagnoses Friedrich’s medievalism as a form of colonialism, writing that ‘He may have even for all I know have considered the bestowal of strings of beads upon the natives’ (p. 44), also seeing in his medieval delusions an imagined superiority that fetishizes the culture of Enlli.

Another character, Wolfgang, is also under the spell of a medievalist delusion in which he sees himself as part of the long line of holy men that extends back to the early medieval Age of Saints. Chamberlain writes of Wolfgang’s eventual breakdown after his self-imposed isolation in language that recalls Cadwaladr’s failings—pride, stubbornness, seclusion. This comparison is

<sup>75</sup> ‘Run’, in *The Bosworth-Toller* <<https://bosworthtoller.com/26037>> accessed 23 Feb 2023; on the religious resonances of ‘run’ see Fred Orton, Ian Wood and Clare A. Lees, *Fragments of History: Rethinking the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments* (Manchester, 2007), 167.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064* (Oxford, 2012), 519.



FIG. 2. Pilgrimage to Bardsey Island (photo of Brenda Chamberlain), 1950, Geoff Charles. Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/National Library of Wales. Reproduced with the permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru.

suggestive, and Wolfgang's fate is directly followed in the book by a kind of deliverance for Cadwaladr who finds himself 'paralysed down the right side of his body' after a cerebral thrombosis (pp. 210–11). Chamberlain's damning judgment of her male protagonists also represents a rejection of a particular kind of nostalgic medievalism that seeks to shore up hegemonic, patriarchal power.

Chamberlain's vision here is not without its tensions: she never directly acknowledges her own position of privilege in *Tide-race* as an outsider who could judge the islanders with a certain distant hauteur. A photograph by Geoff Charles from 1950 (Fig. 2), in which Chamberlain sits astride the bow of a boat and looks directly and imperiously into the camera as a group of men and boys are hard at work loading cattle, perfectly encapsulates this tension. Although Chamberlain's protagonists are based on real people, they are also heightened characters that serve the drama of her own production. Indeed, she acknowledges this at the end of her book when she talks about herself and the other islanders as kinds of puppets engaged in a *danse macabre*: 'On this small stage, this microcosm, in the middle of a scene, the shadow of death falls on the players' (p. 222). What is unspoken here is the extent to which the people of Enlli had been her puppets in the narrative of *Tide-race*.

### THE WIFE'S LAMENT

Although *The Seafarer* laments the fact that men on land cannot know what he suffers at sea (ll. 27–30), for Chamberlain it is '[t]he wife who sits at home before the red hearth' who 'does not know with what endurance he faces danger in paths of exile': this adaptation transforms the



conflict at the heart of her portrait of Cadwaladr, and of Enlli, into a gendered conflict. Marilyn Desmond observes that ‘the [Old English] female exile expresses no philosophical basis for hope: hers is an exile so pervasive, an exile so thoroughly inscribed in her language and in her culture, that her elegiac vision cannot include expressions of consolation.’<sup>77</sup> For Klein, and for Chamberlain too, this inability to find spiritual consolation is bound up with the gendered experience of exile as the antithesis between movement and stasis.<sup>78</sup> In this section I will explore how interweaving *The Wife’s Lament* with *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* allows Chamberlain to extend her critique of masculine visions of the island. Following Walford Davies, I argue that Chamberlain enacts a kind of vengeance for Dilys Cadwaladr, the poet predecessor to Chamberlain on Enlli, who was driven from the island by Thomas Griffiths—the islander who became the fictional Cadwaladr in *Tide-race*. It is through her adaptation of *The Wife’s Lament*, I suggest, that Chamberlain gives voice to this lost islander and moves towards finding a communal, collective voice for the women of Enlli.

In her extended verbal portrait of Cadwaladr one of the weaknesses Chamberlain identifies in his armour seems to have no parallel in either *The Wanderer* or *The Seafarer*: that is, the ‘times when he might be plotting a subtle devilry’ (p. 95). This capacity for deception rather than remorse or reflection comes increasingly to define Cadwaladr in the latter part of *Tide-race* and is drawn from the language of *The Wife’s Lament*. In *The Wife’s Lament* an unknown group of men are said to have plotted to separate the speaker and her lord, or lover:

Ða ic me feran gewat folgað secan,  
wineleas wræcca for minre weaþearfe.  
Ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan  
þurh dyrne geþoht þæt hy todælden unc,  
þæt wit gewidost in woruldrice  
lifdon laðlicost, ond mec longade.  
(ll. 9–14)

[When I myself departed, seeking refuge, / A lonely exile compelled by my lack, / That man’s kin began, through secret devices / to strive to divide us, / so that we would live furthest apart in the world, / most wretchedly, and I yearned.]

Deceit and trickery are rife in this passage from *The Wife’s Lament*. These plots and their tragic consequences are felt throughout the poem. The verb ‘hycgan’ expresses an ‘intent’ to cause division that implicates the malignancy of the actions of this group.<sup>79</sup> In ‘dyrne geþoht’ [‘secret devices’/‘hidden thought’] we have an evocative phrase that only increases the sense of the poem’s mystery. As Benjamin Saltzman writes, ‘dyrne’ is a semantically versatile word in Old English, encompassing ‘various senses of secrecy and concealment, from the unknown and invisible to the mysterious and cloaked to the obscure and remote.’<sup>80</sup> The deviousness of the people surrounding the speaker becomes gradually more threatening:

Ða ic me ful gemæcne monnan funde  
heardsæligne, hygegeomorne,  
mod miþendne, morþor hycgende

<sup>77</sup> Marilyn Desmond, ‘The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy,’ *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 572–90 (588).

<sup>78</sup> Klein, ‘Gender and the Nature of Exile’, 120.

<sup>79</sup> ‘hycgan,’ in *The Bosworth Toller* <<https://bosworthtoller.com/020235>> accessed 23 Feb 2023.

<sup>80</sup> Saltzman, ‘Secrecy and Hermeneutic Potential’, 38. ‘Dyrne’ in *The Dictionary of Old English, A-I* <<https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.libproxy.york.ac.uk/doi/>> accessed 23 Feb 2023.

bliþe gebæro.  
(ll. 18–21a)

[When I found myself a suitable man, / unlucky, miserable, / concealing his mind, plotting murder / beneath a happy bearing.]

The speaker finds herself unable to find new allies, falling deeper into suspicion and isolation. The capacity for deception and devilry is not necessarily unique to Cadwaladr in *Tide-race* but is a symptom of flawed masculinity on the island. In the first section of the book Chamberlain makes a statement about ‘seafarers’ in general, which again offers a direct adaptation of the passage from *The Wife’s Lament* quoted above: ‘The suave, secretive faces of sea-farers! You may know them by the radiance that streams from their cheeks and brows. Their lips are cunning as they smile with mouths of men who have mastered fear’ (p. 17). The smiles of the seafarers are masks for the underhanded deviousness of the men of the island. As it courses through Chamberlain’s memoir this language of deception is haunted by the injustices suffered by the speaker of *The Wife’s Lament* and by the former Enlli resident Dilys Cadwaladr.

When Chamberlain dramatizes an attempt made by the islanders to overthrow Cadwaladr from his abusive assumed position at the top of the island’s hierarchy, the devilry intensifies. She describes how ‘Watching him helplessly, he became in our eyes the embodiment of invincible devilry until he grew bigger than life in the glory of putting so much fear into us’ (p. 148). Although the islanders succeed in drawing ‘[t]he sting ... out of Cadwaladr’s tail’ the result is that his ‘subtle devilry’ becomes all the more insidious: ‘From that time on, he never again showed his hand openly; preferring to work in subterranean ways more suited to his genius’ (p. 152). With ‘subterranean’ Chamberlain finds yet another synonym for Cadwaladr’s deceptive capabilities. The description contrasts with a feminine imagery of the cave in *Tide-race*, a visio-verbal thread that runs throughout the memoir in sketches of dark cave mouths and descriptions of tidal caverns. ‘Subterraneous’ may also have been suggested by *The Wife’s Lament*, as the speaker in that poem finds herself confined to a cave:

Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe,  
under actreo in þam eorðscræfe.  
Eald is þes eorðsele; eal ic eom oflongad.  
(ll. 27–9)

[He commanded me to dwell in a woodland grove / under an oak tree, in an earth-cave. / This earth-hall is ancient; and I am filled entirely with longing.]

Both *eorðscræf* (ll. 28, 36) and *eorðsele* (l. 29) can refer to either caves or graves. The ‘earth-cave’ or ‘earth-hall’ are an example of language in *The Wife’s Lament* that has been used to argue that the speaker in this poem communicates from beyond the grave as a ‘spectral’ presence ‘forced to haunt the place of her burial’, as Sarah Semple writes.<sup>81</sup>

Although readings of *The Wife’s Lament* that see the speaker as a revenant and understand the final lines as representing a grudge or a curse against her former lover are contested, they are productive for understanding the use to which Chamberlain puts the elegy in her memoir.<sup>82</sup> As

<sup>81</sup> Sarah Semple, ‘A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England’, *World Archaeology*, 30 (1998), 109–26 (121–2).

<sup>82</sup> See: Raymond P. Tripp, Jr, ‘The Narrator as Revenant: A Reconsideration of Three Old English Elegies’, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 8 (1972), 339–61; Elinor Lench, ‘The Wife’s Lament. A Poem of the Living Dead’, *Comitatus*, 1 (1970), 3–23; William C. Johnson, ‘The Wife’s Lament as Death-Song’, in Martin Green (ed.), *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research* (Rutherford, NJ, 1983), 69–81. For a refutation of this reading see: Paul Battles, ‘Of Graves, Caves, and Subterranean Dwellings: eorðscræf and eorðsele in *The Wife’s Lament*’, *Philological Quarterly*, 73 (1994), 267–86.

Susan E. Deskis suggests, the poet uses a number of lexemes associated with death and with the grave: 'multivalent imagery [that] does not require us to read the speaker in this way, but ... certainly allows us to do so.'<sup>83</sup> One of the many ghosts that haunts Chamberlain's *Tide-race* is Dilys Cadwaladr. Although she was publicly 'tight-lipped' about her departure, according to Walford Davies, Cadwaladr gave a 'harrowing' account of her persecution in a personal letter from October 1948.<sup>84</sup> Driven into exile from the island because of Griffiths, her fate is matched by that of the speaker of *The Wife's Lament* and the potential grudge she bears towards her deceivers. Griffiths' character is haunted in *Tide-race* by the name of the woman he tormented, where language from *The Wife's Lament* is used to expose his flaws.

## CONCLUSION

What remains in the space left by the discredited men of the island is precisely the 'tongue still vocal in the dust' (p. 220), for which the narrator expresses a longing towards the end of *Tide-race*. Here Chamberlain writes about the ruins of the island, which give 'provocative hints of the past' (p. 221), and its ghosts—'legions of dead innocent men and sinners' (p. 221). Instead of these dead men she tunes into the voices that exist in a 'disembodied state [that] is lostness and yearning' (p. 222), in a clear echo of the speaker 'filled entirely with longing' and confined to exile in *The Wife's Lament*. These voices are a collective expression of lament, which belongs to the women of the island and is sounded throughout the memoir, like the chorus of keening women found in Synge's 1904 play *Riders to the Sea*. In *Tide-race* this chorus waits for the return of a lover or husband away at sea, where death by drowning and ensuing tragedy are always a possibility:

There is fog at the edge of the tide, sad and cold, ancient and out of time. The boat will not come back tonight. The swell breaks over the half-submerged rocks at the entrance; and the women who have waited and the women who will wait for men to come over the waves, are round me in the darkness of the boat-house. ... At twilight I am far from warm-blooded contacts; chilled by an inhuman world of shade. There are gulfs of fog between me and other mortals. It is as if life-blood had been turned to water. ...

Some things she sees of which she does not speak; tissues of the past still stream upon the air before her. (pp. 60–61)

These are not triumphant voices and yet this collective 'she' is granted the gift of preternatural sight, which gives her special significance and power as mourner and rememberer within her community. The waiting women represent an experience of anxiety and stasis like that experienced by the women of the Old English elegies: the reference to being far from 'warm-blooded contacts' seems to allude directly to lines 33b–34 of *The Wife's Lament* and the distant 'leofe lif-gende' ['dear living'], for example. They are also haunted by the women of the Second World War, waiting at home in anticipatory grief and somehow frozen in this trauma of the recent past. It is a medieval modern chorus that collapses time on the haunted island of Enlli.

Clare A. Lees argues that 'women's writing of the past—creative, public, scholarly—forms one strand of an archive of women's history that is still being put together.'<sup>85</sup> This article has contributed to the archive of women writing the past by looking at a memoir that takes us beyond the metropolitan centres of modernism to Wales, and to a complicated period in medievalism's literary-critical history: the decades after the Second World War and during the onset of the Cold

<sup>83</sup> Susan E. Deskis, 'Lyric Modes and Metaphor in the Wife's Lament', *English Studies*, 101 (2020), 383–98.

<sup>84</sup> Walford Davies, *Cartographies*, 230 n. 92.

<sup>85</sup> Clare A. Lees, 'Women Write the Past: Medieval Scholarship, Old English and New Literature', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 93 (2017), 3–22 (4).

War. Chamberlain's gendered vision of Enlli is not utopian, in fact the voice that she gives to the women of Enlli is one of perpetual anxiety and lament. She nevertheless begins to question the hegemony of an island ideal that has been reified since the Middle Ages. The island of her memoir is remapped by Chamberlain's rejection of the traditional myths and narratives that gather to this island space, supposedly haunted by the bones of thousands of holy men. For Chamberlain, Enlli is not a place of spiritual pilgrimage, as in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*; this is a place with its own uncanny agency and without consolation, as in *The Wife's Lament*.

Rejecting the well-rehearsed patriarchal histories of Enlli and finding in the Old English elegies a creative resource with which she might articulate her gendered experience of island life, in *Tide-race* Chamberlain expressed her increasing ambivalence about her status as Welsh artist and writer. After the book's publication, Chamberlain found herself unwelcome on Enlli. As she sought a new home, she wrote works of autofiction and memoir that were focused on post-war politics in Europe—the relationship between Germany and Russia in Prussia (formerly Westphalia) during the Cold War in *The Water Castle* (1964), and the Greek Junta as experienced from the island of Ydra in *A Rope of Vines* (1965). Although there is not scope to consider it here, *A Rope of Vines* nevertheless perpetuates some of her medievalist impulses by focusing on women's religious communities on this Greek island. Unlike her contemporaries David Jones and Lynette Roberts, Brenda Chamberlain attempted to remake herself as a European rather than a purely Welsh writer after the Second World War. Chamberlain's *Tide-race* is testament to how early medieval culture continued to be a critical and creative tool for thinking through essential aspects of late twentieth-century identity, and of the rich critical histories we discover if we look beyond accepted canons.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> See also Lees, 'Old English at the Midcentury', 149.